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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, December 13, 2007

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Report: More children poor, abused in Oakland County

Better news: Fewer Michigan teens binge drinking and smoking.

By Jerry Wolffe
Journal Register News Service

The number of children receiving less than adequate parental care, being born with lower birthweights, living in poverty and being abused has increased in Oakland County, according to a statewide report released last week.

In addition, the 2007 Kids Count in Michigan said fewer Michigan teens are binge drinking and smoking but more children are overweight and exercising too little.

Unless Michigan acts more decisively in the next few years, the state will fail to meet many national standards for healthy children, families and neighborhoods, said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate at the Michigan League for Human Services and project director.

"Being healthy is about much more than just making sure a child gets adequate medical care," she said. "The health of our children reflects the conditions in which they live in our communities, such as housing, and the resources in their families and neighborhoods."

The most dramatic improvement reflected declines in substance abuse among teens.

Binge drinking among Michigan high school students dropped by 23 percent and tobacco use by 22 percent between 2000 and 2005, according to the study.

In 2005, 23 percent of high school students reported using tobacco during the previous 30 days compared with 30 percent in 2001.

The rate of students who reported consuming five or more alcoholic drinks within a couple of hours dropped from 29 percent to 23 percent over the same period, the study found.

Twelve percent of high school students were overweight in Michigan compared with the target rate of 5 percent. Only 62 percent of Michigan teens did vigorous exercise compared with the ideal of 85 percent.

However, in order to meet the Healthy People 2010 target of 11 percent of high school students binge drinking, Michigan's 2005 rate would have to drop by half in the last five years of the decade.

In Oakland County, the study found that between 2000 and 2005:

the number of children receiving less than adequate prenatal care jumped to 13.6 percent from 13.1 percent;

infant mortality increased to 6.7 per 1,000 births from 6.2 percent;

children living in poverty climbed to 10.1 percent from 7.1 percent;

child abuse rose to 7.2 percent from 4.4 percent;

The study also said children removed from their home because of abuse or neglect jumped to 4.2 percent in 2006 from 2.7 percent in 2000. In addition, only 11.4 percent of fourth-graders met math standards in 2006-07 compared with 24 percent in 2002-03. Only 25.2 percent of eighth-graders met math standards compared with 35.4 percent in 2002-03 in the county, the study said.

Oakland County, the fourth richest county in the nation, had an average wage per job of \$49,277 and monthly child-care costs of \$678.

The state did achieve Healthy People 2010 standards for immunizations for toddlers, teen pregnancy and physical fights among high school students.

HP 2010, a national initiative to advance health and well-being, found the state rate for fully immunized toddlers hit the target of 80 percent. In 2005, the state pregnancy rate of 28 per 1,000 teens, ages 15-17, was well below the target of 43 per 1,000 and the 30 percent of Michigan high school students who reported having been involved in a fight in the previous year fell below the target of 32 percent.

"This good news didn't hold true for everybody," said Michele Corey, community advocacy director at Michigan's Children, a partner in the project.

"These achievements mask substantial disparities by race. Rates on those measures are much worse for African-American children who are three times more likely to live in poverty than white children," Corey said.

"Unless we change our strategies dramatically, African-American children will not meet the target goals by 2010."

Blacks also have triple the rates of infant mortality, and double the death rates for young children, hospitalizations for asthma among young children and low-birthweight babies, the study found.

"These trends are particularly troubling as these childhood conditions elevate the risk of latter physical or emotional health problems as the children and youth become adults," said Zehnder-Merrell.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.dailytribune.com/stories/121307/loc_kids.shtml



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Published December 13, 2007

Jane Zehnder-Merrell

is a senior research associate at the Michigan League for Human Services and Kids Count project director.

Michele Corey

is director of community advocacy for Michigan's Children, a nonprofit group.

Jane Zehnder-Merrell and Michele Corey: Health trends are bad in state

The latest Kids Count in Michigan report released Dec. 4 shows that we, as a state, cannot afford to continue the status quo for children and families. Unless Michigan acts more decisively over the next few years, the state will fail to meet many of the national standards for healthy children, families and neighborhoods.

Michigan's lack of progress toward the national Healthy People 2010 targets suggests our policymakers must rethink their priorities. The message of the 2007 Kids Count report is basic: Children, families and communities need to be healthy. Their health reflects the conditions in which they live, and the resources available to support them. Public policy decisions directly affect those conditions and resources.

The 18 targets examined in this report reflect conditions for children in Michigan and its communities from infancy through adolescence. An overarching goal of Healthy People 2010 as well as state policy is the elimination of disparities in health outcomes among racial and ethnic groups.

The findings detailed in the 2007 Data Book show that as a state, we will not meet many of the Healthy People targets, nor are the disparities lessening. Michigan rates worsened in the areas of child abuse and neglect, low birth-weight babies, overweight high school students and a companion problem of too few youth exercising vigorously on a regular basis.

The targets Michigan has achieved are areas that have received priority attention in the Legislature and by communities across the state: fully immunizing our toddlers, teen pregnancy and physical fighting among high school students. When we put resources behind reaching a target, we see some success.

Improvements have been made, but with a backdrop of increasing economic insecurity for families and the continued erosion of public dollars available for critical programs, sustaining the current rate of improvement won't get us to most of the targets by 2010. Furthermore, successes were not universal. There were substantial disparities by race with African-American children facing double the risk of Caucasian children, and sometimes more, on almost every indicator.

Locally, 19 percent of Ingham County children live in poverty compared to 17 percent statewide. And the rates of low birth-weight babies, pre-term births, and infant mortality are going up instead of down. On the positive side, Ingham County has met the targets for lower rates of teen pregnancy and teen deaths.

How can Ingham County meet other targets by 2010?

1. Make sure 350 more toddlers a year get all their shots.
2. Provide a foundation of support to more moms before and during pregnancy so that 187 fewer babies will be born too early.
3. Keep 300 children a year from being abused or neglected by providing prevention services to their caregivers.

These are reachable targets for Michigan and for the Lansing region. But we must work together as a community and as a state with help from Gov. Jennifer Granholm and our legislators to reach them. Our children - the future of Michigan - deserve this attention.

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U.S. DISTRICT COURT

‘Stomach turning’ Pair of Hartford men receive long prison terms for producing child pornography

By Herald-Palladium Staff

December 12, 2007

GRAND RAPIDS — Two Hartford men were both sentenced Monday to 30 years in prison on child pornography convictions – the maximum sentence they could get – U.S. Attorney Charles Gross announced.

Kurt Amundson, 42, and Robert Shafer, 43, each pleaded guilty in July to a charge of producing images of an 11-year-old child engaged in sexually explicit conduct. When they are released they will be under the supervision of the U.S. Probation Office for the rest of their lives.

In imposing the sentences, U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker rejected the two men’s request for leniency. The judge described their conduct as “stomach turning” and “heinous” and said he wanted to send a clear message to people who would prey on children.

On June 29, 2006, law enforcement officers executed a search warrant at the Amundson/Shaffer home. They seized computers, cameras and other digital media including compact and floppy disks.

Gross said investigators found multiple images of child pornography, including images of the 11-year-old child, whom the men had befriended.

Amundson and Shafer were licensed foster care providers and were in the process of adopting a child they had been fostering. That child and the child they had befriended both alleged the men had sexually assaulted them.

They were indicted by a federal grand jury on June 6 for producing pornographic images of the 11-year-old and have been in custody since their arrest two days later.

Judge Jonker said he was troubled by their “misuse of the foster care system.” He ordered them to make restitution to the victim.

The investigation was conducted by the FBI and Van Buren County Sheriff’s Department, with the assistance of the Hartford Police Department. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel Mekaru.

The case was part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to proj-

ect children from online exploitation and abuse. The U.S. Attorney's office, county prosecutors, the Internet Crimes Against Children task force and federal, state and local law enforcement are working together as part of the initiative.

More information about the initiative is available at projectsafechildhood.gov.



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Published December 13, 2007

Lay Catholic board says child protection in dioceses has improved

Midday update

Rachel Zoll
Associated Press

Roman Catholic dioceses nationwide have taught more than 6 million children to protect themselves from sexual predators and have conducted 1.6 million background checks on workers in response to the clergy sex abuse crisis, according to a new report.

Auditors hired by America's bishops have found that nearly all of the 195 U.S. dioceses have policies for reviewing molestation claims and reporting allegations to the authorities, the National Review Board, a lay watchdog group, said in the report released Thursday. The Diocese of Lincoln, Neb., and four Eastern Rite districts called eparchies have not participated in the audits.

Despite improvements, church leaders must do more, including measuring the effectiveness of the safeguards they've put in place and deepening the church's understanding of what victims suffer, the panel said.

"Discussion with victims provide evidence of serious needs that still must be addressed in order for the victims and their families to find the healing that they need," the board said.

The report is a review of the board's work on the fifth anniversary of its founding.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops created the lay panel to monitor diocesan reforms enacted in 2002 at the height of the abuse crisis.

The scandal erupted with the case of an accused priest in the Archdiocese of Boston, then spread nationwide and beyond. More than 13,000 molestation claims have been made to dioceses, which have paid more than \$2 billion in settlements since 1950, according to separate studies conducted for the bishops.

The child protection plan that the bishops adopted in the wake of the crisis bars guilty clergy from any public church work, raising complex questions about how dioceses can supervise the priests after they're removed. In some cases, the Vatican has laicized - or defrocked - offenders. They have left the church completely.

The National Review Board has been encouraging bishops to conduct random parish audits to check how well the reforms are working and learn what approaches are the most effective. This year, several dioceses volunteered for parish audits in a pilot program that the board hopes will be a model.

A safe environment working group, comprised of board members, bishops and consultants, has been studying how children in dioceses have been taught to identify inappropriate conduct, looking at age and grade appropriateness and church teaching relevant to the training.

The group made recommendations based on its review, but those conclusions have not been made public, said U.S. District Judge Michael Merz, chairman of the review board.

The national board also recommended best strategies for local diocesan review boards that help individual bishops evaluate abuse claims. A bishops' panel is reviewing the suggestions.

Starting next year, only one-third of dioceses will be required to have an audit, although others can volunteer for a review. No plan is in place yet for how to choose them, Merz said.

Besides stressing the need for more attention to victims, the board said that bishops should be more aware of how a parish suffers when its priest is removed.

"Parishes also become victims of sexual abuse," the board said. "Members of parishes experience both a sense of betrayal or outrage over accusations that led to the removal of a pastor."

Regarding clergy, the board said bishops must work harder to repair relations with priests "many of whom feel alienated from both the bishops and laity" because of the scandal.

The board urged bishops to work faster in reviewing claims and restoring wrongly accused priests to the pulpit.

"The phenomenon of false accusations is very, very uncommon," said Merz, who sits in the Southern District of Ohio. But the board has heard "anecdotal" from priests' groups about slow justice for wrongly accused clergy.

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Jurors find Hartford man guilty of hitting wife in head

Wednesday, December 12, 2007 10:38 AM EST

CASSOPOLIS - Family members came to the rescue in Cass County Fourth District Court Tuesday morning.

Despite the unwillingness of a local woman to stand up to her assailant, family members recounted to the jury how Ernest Baham, 25, of 59163 62nd Ave., Hartford, violently slugged his wife Rikki on the side of the head while outside her mother's home in the early fall of 2007.

Assistant Prosecutor Diab Rizk, who presented the case, provided testimony of the victim's mother, Tammie Gersitz, and the victim's brother, Ryan Ridenour.

They indicated that the punch occurred on Sept. 9 in front of the mother's Wayne Township home.

Both the victim and defendant were living in Hartford at the time of the incident.

Rizk called the mother as his first witness.

Gersitz indicated that daughter Rikki and Rikki's husband Ernest got into a heated argument outside her home.

At that time, Ms. Gersitz went inside.

However, Rikki's brother Ryan remained.

Ridenour, 15, explained that he then witnessed Baham punch his sister in the head while the married couple were inside a parked car near the home.

Ridenour indicated he had witnessed assaultive violence repeatedly in the past and does not want to see his own sister become a similar victim.

Gersitz and Ridenour also testified that Baham and the victim drove off together after the assault.

At the Dec. 11 jury trial, Rikki Baham testified that nothing violent happened.

She claimed she was never punched or assaulted by her husband, contrary to the testimony of her own mother and brother.

After hearing and evaluating the testimony of Ridenour and Gersitz, the jury found otherwise.

They deliberated for 30 minutes before reaching their unanimous verdict.

Cass County Prosecutor Victor Fitz praised the family members for coming forward.

Fitz indicated that "family members are the first line of defense in domestic violence. It is essential that they shed light on this deplorable crime."

Cass County Sheriff's Deputy David Nevins investigated the case for his department.

District Judge Paul Deats presided over the trial.

Baham was sentenced immediately after the verdict to 10 days in jail.

Domestic violence is punishable by 93 days in jail and/or a \$500 fine.



Domestic dispute forces lockdown

Thursday, December 13, 2007

THE SAGINAW NEWS

HARRISON -- Clare County sheriff's deputies intend to seek warrants after a manhunt forced Farwell Area Schools to go on lockdown.

The scenario unfolded about 2 p.m. Monday when a woman reported a domestic dispute with an armed suspect at her Lake George home, said Detective Lt. Mark McClellan.

The 30-year-old victim said her estranged husband, a 29-year-old Sanford man, showed up at the house to discuss child care issues regarding the couple's son.

The suspect supposedly said he wanted custody of the boy, McClellan said, and refused to leave until his son returned home from school.

Then the estranged couple and others at the house started fighting, he said. The suspect reportedly pulled a gun and threatened the occupants of the home, McClellan said.

The suspect fled by the time police arrived.

Farwell Area Schools were locked down to prevent the man from retrieving his son, McClellan said.

Police also stepped up high-visibility patrols.

About 8 p.m., Midland County sheriff's deputies advised they had arrested the suspect and lodged him in the Midland County Jail on local charges.

Clare County sheriff's deputies were to submit a report and warrant requests to the Clare County prosecutor sometime this week. v

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President Bush vetoes child health bill again

- Story Highlights
- President Bush: Measure is "essentially identical" to the proposal he vetoed before
- Bill would have expanded the State Children's Health Insurance Program
- Bush: Measure "moves our country's health care system in the wrong direction"
- Program covers 6 million children whose parents don't qualify for Medicaid

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- President Bush vetoed an expansion of the federally funded, state-run health insurance program for poor children for a second time Wednesday, telling Congress the bill "moves our country's health care system in the wrong direction."

In his veto message, Bush said the bill is almost a duplicate of the proposal he spiked in October.

"Because the Congress has chosen to send me an essentially identical bill that has the same problems as the flawed bill I previously vetoed, I must veto this legislation, too," he said in a statement released by the White House.

The bill would have expanded the State Children's Health Insurance Program by nearly \$35 billion over five years, the same as the measure [Bush](#) vetoed October 3.

The president had proposed adding \$5 billion to the program and said the version he vetoed would have encouraged families to leave the private insurance market for the federally funded, state-run program.

Democratic leaders said the new version addressed Republican objections by tightening restrictions on illegal immigrants receiving SCHIP benefits, capping the income levels of families that qualify for the program and preventing adults from receiving benefits.

Though the measure had strong bipartisan support, it fell short of the two-thirds majorities needed to override a presidential veto in the House and Senate.

House Minority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, said Democrats were more interested in scoring political points with the veto than in reaching a compromise with Republicans.

"We could have resolved the differences in his program in 10 minutes, if the majority had wanted to resolve the differences," Boehner said. "This has become a partisan political game."

The program currently covers about 6 million children whose parents earn too much to qualify for [Medicaid](#) -- the federal health insurance program for the poor -- but who can't afford private insurance.

Democrats wanted to extend the program to another 4 million, paying for it with a 61-cent-per-pack increase in the federal tax on cigarettes.

"What a sad day that the president would say that rather than insuring [millions of] children, 'I don't want to raise the cigarette tax,' " said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

She called for a January 23 vote on whether to override the veto.

Meanwhile, Bush called on Congress to extend funding for the current program to keep the 6 million now covered on the rolls.

All About[George W. Bush](#) • [Medicaid](#)

Find this article at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/12/12/bush.schip/index.html>

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Higher heating costs ahead

By LIZ SHEPARD Argus-Press Staff Writer
Wednesday, December 12, 2007 10:30 AM EST

Residents are going to have to fork over a little more to keep their homes heated this winter, and for those who need assistance in covering the utility bill, it may mean an even tougher season.

"I worry about our clients because our seniors are already struggling to pay utilities, and with the projected increase over the winter, it's going to really, really hurt them," said Becky Zemla, Capital Area Community Services Owosso center coordinator.

According to the Michigan Public Service Commission, as of Monday, residents who use heating oil have seen an increase of 79 cents compared to last year's average. The cost is now averaging \$3.15 per gallon, a 33 percent jump.

Propane customers are paying about \$2.33 per gallon this week, a 44-cent, or 23 percent, increase from last year's average.

Propane has a lower BTU level per gallon than heating oil, requiring more of it to be used to create the same amount of energy.

Much of the blame can be placed on the price of crude oil, said Jeffrey Pillon, the project manager for the MPSC's energy appraisal.

Propane has seen a smaller increase due to it being processed from both crude oil and natural gas. The price of natural gas is remaining fairly stable from last year.

Zemla said there is a worry the increased cost will either use the funds CACS has to assist utility payments sooner, or result in CACS helping fewer people.

Currently, she said, funding is stable. She anticipates receiving about \$70,000 to go toward utilities from groups including MPSC and DHS. They also host the Walk for Warmth fundraiser in February to try to raise money.

Last year about \$8,000 was raised from the event, and it was all used within two months.

"I think it's going to be tough. I think it's going to be a tough winter for our families and our seniors," Zemla said.

Each year the number of people assisted depends on the price of energy and the amount of funding CACS receives.

CACS assisted 341 people during the 2006-07 heating season with utility bills. This year it is looking to help 310 people. Zemla said there are always more people in need than they have the funding to help - and the number is growing.

"We're seeing a huge increase in people who have lost their jobs this year," Zemla said, adding about 60 percent of county residents looking for users this season.

About 43 percent of CACS clients are working poor, with about 8 percent people who receive cash assistance from the Department of Human Services with fixed or no incomes.

The climbing cost of energy is also causing concern for the Michigan Department of Human Services.

"Cost and the number of people coming to us, the economy of Michigan, all of those things enter into this," said DHS spokesperson Maureen Sorbet.

Currently, about \$113 million has been slated for the Crisis Energy Assistance under the State Emergency Relief Program - \$34 million less than last year.

Sorbet said it will be difficult to pinpoint what the final amount of funding will be as some federal funds can depend on the severity of the winter : it was stalled twice because the department ran out of money for it.

"We are very concerned about what kind of impact this will have on our low-income residents," Sorbet said.

MPSC projected in October that under normal winter weather, natural gas consumers will pay about \$764, an 8 percent increase, during the heating season through March. Under the same criteria, heating oil customers will spend about \$1,593, up 27 percent from last year and propane users will spend about \$1,113, up 23 percent.





Muskegon Chronicle

Triplets in shelter now have a home for the holidays

Thursday, December 13, 2007

CHRONICLE NEWS SERVICE

Home, home and home for the holidays.

That's the latest way to describe the living situation of Barry County triplets and a mother whose eyes finally reflect hope -- a foursome whose homelessness triggered an outpouring of support from hundreds of people nationwide.

"Thank you," said a relieved Monica Roberts, looking about the 1,300-square-foot apartment she and her little ones and their grandmother now call home. "For the prayers, for the donations, for the letters."

Roberts, who turns 34 two days before Christmas, was first in the news after her physician discovered that, after his patient and her newborn triplets left Saint Mary's Health Care, they ended up in a women's shelter near Hastings.

That has all changed as news of her plight made national news, prompting gifts ranging in size from \$5 to \$5,000. In all, an irrevocable trust fund in the children's names now tops \$32,000, its trustee confirmed Wednesday.

This past Saturday, Roberts and her mother, Angela Cole, and babies Noah, Jonathan and Grace moved after a five-week stay at Green Gables Haven to Quail Ridge Apartments on the outskirts of downtown Hastings.

The triplets were conceived during what Roberts acknowledged was a casual, short-term relationship with a man she maintains has yet to step forward.

"I wish I could have made some different decisions," she said of the relationship. "But I felt these babies were meant to be."

Judging from letters she received that accompanied cash gifts, so did a lot of others.

"You are one incredible, brave woman to accept responsibility and bring these beautiful babies into this world," wrote a couple from Lansing who included a check for \$100. "You could so easily have made a different choice."

"Honey," wrote a woman from Port Sanilac, "please be assured that the Lord has a great plan for you and your little ones."

The note included \$50.

Roberts still is making her way through four huge folders crammed with notes from as far away as New York and Washington state and intends to answer each with a thank-you.

"These cards," Roberts said, "(are) just so sweet."

Roberts hopes to be a medical transcriptionist again when her babies are older but now relies on public assistance, just over \$400 a month and expected to increase. Her disabled mother receives \$745 monthly.

Roberts entertained more than one offer of housing -- including use of a home in Ohio -- before settling on

Quail Ridge, where she enjoys three bedrooms, a washer-dryer unit and central air.

"There were a couple of psychos," she adds good-naturedly, including at least one offer from a prison inmate hoping to set up house with her.

"Oh, please," she said with a little laugh. "That's all I need."

Photo * Chronicle News Service

Monica Roberts holds Grace while her other babies, Jonathan, left, and Noah, sleep. Roberts moved out of a Hastings women's shelter and into an apartment Saturday with her babies and her mother.

"Thank you. For the prayers, for the donations, for the letters."

-- Monica Roberts

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Salvation Army donations urgent

Thursday, December 13, 2007

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Requests for help are swamping the Salvation Army of Saginaw County.

Unfortunately, the number of people seeking assistance with food, clothing and toys is growing faster than kettle donations, said Maj. Wayne Ruston, who with his wife, Maj. Tracy Ruston, leads the corps at 2030 N. Carolina in Saginaw.

So far, 1,877 families -- representing 6,570 men, women and children -- have turned to the Christian agency to help make their Christmas bright.

Last year, funds from the Army's annual Red Kettle fundraiser assisted 1,632 families comprising 5,545 individuals.

"We've collected \$109,500, or nearly 47 percent of our bell-ringing goal of \$235,000," Wayne Ruston said. "The goal is the same as it was last year, to be realistic with the economy the way it is. Unfortunately, kettle donations are up just 1 percent, but Christmas requests have risen by 15 percent.

"Some way, we need to close that gap, or there will be disappointed people at Christmas."

Some 40 bell ringers are stationed with red kettles throughout Saginaw County.

To make a donation, call the Salvation Army office at 793-8371. v

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Helping hands: Knitters get busy fulfilling a friend's final wish

BY NANCY HIRSCH

Special to the Record-Eagle

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Marguerite Yahr had a big heart -- and an apartment full of yarn.

Born in Mayfield and living at Traverse City's Glen Eagle independent living facility, her dream had been to make knitted items for Santa Claus to deliver to needy children through Operation Christmas Child.

Yahr was well-loved and respected by fellow residents at Glen Eagle. So when she died in April, friends there came forward to help fulfill her final wish.

Operation Christmas Child is a holiday shoebox ministry serving children around the world who would otherwise receive little or nothing for Christmas. Donors to the project are asked to supply children's items of all kinds, which had sparked interest from Yahr and fellow knitter Lori Urch.

However, when Yahr's health declined, she was moved to Munson Hospice House and unable to participate like she'd planned. While she still could, though, she expressed a wish to good friend Pattie Jo Tower: She wanted all of her yarn to go to Operation Christmas Child.

"When I entered her apartment, I was amazed at the amount of yarn I found there," said Tower. "It took six huge laundry baskets to transfer all of it down to Lori's apartment. I even found yarn in Marguerite's filing cabinet."

Since Yahr hadn't been able to drive, many friends and relatives, along with some health care workers, had kept her supplied in yarn.

"She was always knitting," said fellow Glen Eagle resident Abbie Pieper. "One day I said that I wished I could knit, and Marguerite said she would be glad to teach me. She was a wonderful lady and a friend to everyone."

Several other residents and members of the housekeeping staff joined the lessons.

Meanwhile, wherever Yahr went, her knitting needles were clicking: making a sweater for a relative or a scarf for someone, simply if she thought they needed one. She was a big contributor to the Mitten Tree that stood in Glen Eagle's Activities Room each December, and was a regular donor to Goodwill, the Women's Resource Center and other charities.

After Yahr's death, her friends picked up where she left off. Through Urch's leadership, a group that included residents Evelyn Kinnaird, Grace Harrison, Molly Post, Nadine Thompson and Glen Eagle employee Ginger Burgen knitted more than 200 scarves, mittens, hats, headbands, vests, slippers and sweaters for Operation Christmas Child. Urch alone produced more than 100 of the items.

In addition, Melania Shults hand sewed denim purses, while others provided gifts or made monetary donations for toys, school supplies and candy.

Even after the Operation Christmas Child deadline came and went at the end of September, yarn remained. The group continued to knit then, making baby caps. To date, they've sent more than three dozen to Munson Medical Center in

Traverse City, where they warm the heads of newborns and preemies.

Yahr's influence continues to be felt at Glen Eagle. Knitting, crocheting and rug-hooking sessions are still held regularly at Glen Eagle, where, according to Tower, Yahr's apartment full of yarn became "the gift that keeps on giving."

Thanks to her friends, Yahr's last wish did come true.

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Photos



More than 200 items for children were knitted by friends of the late Marguerite Yahr, who continue to work through her yarn by making caps for newborns at Munson Medical Center.



Friends of Marguerite Yahr at the Glen Eagle independent living facility in Traverse City carried out her final wish by knitting dozens of items for Operation Christmas Child. The holiday shoebox ministry serves children around the world who would otherwise receive little or nothing for Christmas.

Mich. government: It's lean on workers, fat on fringe benefits

December 13, 2007

BY DAWSON BELL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Fewer employees carry the workload for state and local government and public schools in Michigan than in most other states, a new study shows.

But state government employees are paid better and have much better fringe benefits than all but a few states, the study by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan also revealed.

Advertisement

Michigan ranked 45th among the states in the number of public employees per 10,000 residents.

The average base salary of state classified employees was 6th in the nation at \$49,715. And the average cost of fringe benefits for state employees was third-highest, at \$25,703.

"We've made some strides in this area, and there is work left to be done," said Gov. Jennifer Granholm's spokeswoman Liz Boyd of the generous compensation. "Coming out of the budget agreement" on Oct. 1 "there is a commitment to do more."

The nonpartisan CRC, based in Livonia, has conducted extensive research on state budget issues in recent years as debate over spending cuts versus raising taxes raged in Lansing.

Bettie Buss, senior research associate at CRC and author of the study, said her analysis supports some arguments on both sides of that debate.

Buss said the employment numbers, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, indicate that the number of state employees has "declined pretty dramatically." But at the same time, she said she was surprised at "how expensive are our fringe benefits."

Among the findings, Buss said she was most encouraged by the state's relatively high concentration of employees in education, especially higher education. Michigan had higher than the national average rates of employment in three of five education categories, Buss found, the only general area of government activity where that was the case.

Other findings included:

- State police employees per 10,000 residents: 2.8, Rank 42nd
- Prison employees per 10,000 residents: 17.1, Rank 19th
- State natural resources employees per 10,000 residents: 4.5, Rank 35th
- State higher education employees per 10,000 residents: 64.7, Rank 25th

Buss cautioned that the usefulness of the data and her comparisons was limited.

It is difficult to measure relative efficiency of states that may have vastly different structure, culture and needs, she said. Nor is it possible to tell from the census data whether Michigan's education employees are teaching or nonteaching personnel.

Michael LaFaive, director of fiscal policy for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland, which has analyzed state government employee costs for the free market-oriented think tank, said the conclusions of the study coincide with some of his findings.

The wage and benefit numbers indicate that public-sector workers in Michigan "are a privileged class, both by comparison to other public-sector workers and to the private sector," LaFaive said.

Contact **DAWSON BELL** at 313-222-6604 or dbell@freepress.com.

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State shouldn't pay for pricey building

Posted by [Jackson Citizen Patriot](#)

December 13, 2007 09:53AM

The following is the [Jackson Citizen Patriot's](#) editorial for December 13:

With the sorry shape of state finances, it's hard to fathom why a legislative panel this summer approved leasing a new state police headquarters for millions of dollars. The question now: Should the state fight to get out of a bad deal? The answer ought to be yes.

The Granholm administration is pushing to ditch the current headquarters on Harrison Road. It needs repair, and officials say a new site could consolidate operations. The new location at Kalamazoo Street and Grand Avenue would put 550 workers in downtown Lansing.

Those reasons might sound valid, but they don't justify a \$3.7 million-a-year lease for 25 years from a state budget that's already out of whack.

The state gets a good deal on the current site -- a \$1 annual lease through 2030 -- and many say the status quo works well enough. One critic, state Sen. Cameron Brown, even disputes whether the new headquarters would be an improvement. It would lack a helicopter landing pad, for example.

So, how did an expensive undertaking -- which wasn't even bid competitively -- get so far? Some say the Granholm team overstated the problems at the Harrison Road building. The popular perception that this deal is a plum for Joel Ferguson and Gary Granger, the politically active duo who are building the new headquarters. The Legislature has an option to get out from under this: Don't pay the building's lease. Sen. Brown has introduced a bill to yank money for a new headquarters unless the state's rainy-day fund stands at \$1 billion for two consecutive years. The fund is empty today. Unfortunately, the Senate's leadership has bottled up his bill.

The building's developer might go to court if the state refuses to pay, but the fight would be worthwhile. It's certainly much better than paying close to \$100 million for something the state doesn't need.